

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-14

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-07

L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15

USIA-06 /061 W

-----041448 150815Z /13

R 141611Z DEC 77

FM AMEMBASSY MANAGUA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5110

C O N F I D E N T I A L MANAGUA 5638

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, NU

SUBJECT: UDEL ELECTS NEW LEADERSHIP

1. THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL OF THE UNION OF DEMOCRATIC LIBERATION (UDEL), THE COALITION OF DIVERSE OPPOSITIONIST POLITICAL PARTIES AND LABOR ORGANIZATIONS, MET DEC 12 AND ELECTED AS ITS NEW PRESIDENT RAFAEL CORDOVA RIVAS, OF THE CONSERVATIVE SECTOR IN UDEL AND A CLOSE ASSOCIATE OF OUTGOING UDEL PRESIDENT PEDRO J. CHAMORRO. CORDOVA WAS ELECTED BY UNANIMITY ON THE THIRD BALLOT. THE LOSING CANDIDATE, RODOLFO ROBELO, OF THE INDEPENDENT LIBERAL PARTY (PLI), WAS ELECTED SECRETARY-GENERAL, REPLACING EDGARD MACIAS. THE NEWLY ELECTED OFFICERS WILL BE INAUGURATED AT A MEETING IN MATAGALPA DEC 18.

2. BIO DATA ON CORDOVA RIVAS. RAFAEL CORDOVA RIVAS WAS REPORTEDLY BORN IN SAN JOSE, COSTA RICA, OF A HONDURAN FATHER, BUT HAS LIVED MOST OF HIS LIFE IN NICARAGUA. HE HAS A LAW DEGREE FROM THE NATIONAL UNIVERSITY AT LEON. CORDOVA HAS BEEN ACTIVE IN THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY SINCE THE 1940'S. HE WAS ELECTED CONSERVATIVE PARTY TECHNICAL ADVISER OF POLITICAL LAW IN 1960, AND A MEMBER OF THE MANAGUA DEPARTMENTAL COMMITTEE OF THE TRADITIONALIST CONSERVATIVE PARTY (PCT) IN 1966. THROUGHOUT THE LATE 1960'S CORDOVA WAS ALLIED WITH THE P.J. CHAMORRO WING OF THE PCT, WHICH WAS BITTERLY OPPOSED TO THE AGUERO FACTION. ACCORDING TO EMBASSY FILES HE USED TO VISIT
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THE EMBASSY AS CHAMORRO'S REPRESENTATIVE. IN 1970 CORDOVA EMERGED AS A MEMBER OF THE NATIONAL DIRECTORATE OF ACCION NACIONAL CONSERVADORA (ANC), A GROUP ORGANIZED BY P.J. CHAMORRO TO OPPOSE THE AGUERO-CONTROLLED CONSERVATIVE PARTY. ANC HAS BEEN PART OF UDEL SINCE IT WAS FORMED IN 1974.

3. CORDOVA WAS ONE OF THE 21 LAWYERS WHO OFFERED THEIR LEGAL SERVICES

FREE OF CHARGE TO THE CAPTURED PARTICIPANTS IN THE 1959 INVASION OF NICARAGUA WHEN THEY WERE TRIED BY COURTS-MARTIAL. HE CHALLENGED THE VALIDITY OF THE COURT MARTIAL PROCEEDINGS AND THE CHARGES AND WITHDREW FROM THE CASES WHEN THEY WERE SUSTAINED BY THE JUDICIARY. CORDOVA WAS PRESIDENT OF THE NICARAGUAN BAR ASSOCIATION IN 1965. HE WAS DEFENSE ATTORNEY FOR SANDINISTA DEFENDANTS IN THE FSLN TRIALS THAT CAME TO AN END IN EARLY 1977. CORDOVA MOST RECENTLY WAS OFFERED APPOINTMENT TO THE ELECTORAL TRIBUNAL BY THE OFFICIALLY RECOGNIZED CONSERVATIVE PARTY (PCN) BUT TURNED IT DOWN.

4. BIO DATA ON ROBELO. RODOLFO ROBELO HERRERA HAS BEEN A MEMBER OF THE NATIONAL DIRECTORATE OF THE ANTI-SOMOZA INDEPENDENT LIBERAL PARTY (PLI) SINCE 1968. HE WAS SECRETARY-GENERAL OF THE INDEPENDENT LIBERAL YOUTH (JLI), THE YOUTH ARM OF THE PLI, IN 1965. ACCORDING TO AN EMBASSY REPORT OF 1969 ROBELO HAS STATED THAT ALTHOUGH HE BELIEVES IN THE SOCIALIZATION OF THE MEANS OF PRODUCTION IN NICARAGUA HE ALSO BELIEVES IN FREE ELECTIONS AND A PLURALITY OF PARTIES. HE PREVIOUSLY HAS BEEN DESCRIBED AS CRITICAL OF US BUT NOT INTENSELY SO. HE WAS BORN IN LEON, DATE UNKNOWN, AND HAS A LAW DEGREE FROM THE NICARAGUAN NATIONAL UNIVERSITY AT LEON.

5. COMMENT: THE ELECTION OF CORDOVA RIVAS AS PRESIDENT OF UDEL WAS A SECOND-BEST CHOICE FOR CHAMORRO, WHO HAD CLEARLY WISHED TO BE SUCCEEDED IN THE PRESIDENCY OF THE ORGANIZATION BY RAMIRO SACASA, THE ONLY MAN IN UDEL OTHER THAN HIMSELF WITH A NATIONAL REPUTATION. SACASA, HOWEVER, PREFERRED TO KEEP HIS OPTIONS OPEN, POSSIBLY WITH CONFIDENTIAL

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AN EYE TO BECOMING AN OPPOSITION UNITY PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE IN 1981, AND REMOVED HIMSELF FROM CONSIDERATION. ANOTHER POSSIBLE CANDIDACY, EDMUNDO JARQUIN, UDEL'S SECRETARY OF COMMUNICATIONS, WHOM CHAMORRO REGARDS AS HIS POLITICAL HEIR, DID NOT MATERIALIZE PROBABLY BECAUSE HE DOES NOT BELONG TO ANY OF THE NINE ORGANIZATIONS WHICH COMPRISE UDEL AND THE STATUTES OF UDEL REQUIRE THAT THE PRESIDENT BE A MEMBER OF ONE OF THESE ORGANIZATIONS. CORDOVA HAD THE ADVANTAGES OF CLOSENESS TO CHAMORRO, EXTENSIVE POLITICAL EXPERIENCE, A REPUTATION FOR HONESTY, THE BACKING OF THE SACASISTAS AND SOME RECOGNITION FOR HIS DEFENSE OF FSLN MEMBERS. THE ELECTION OF CORDOVA SHOULD NOT CHANGE THE POWER BALANCE WITHIN UDEL. CHAMORRO AND SACASA SHOULD REMAIN UDEL'S MOST PRESTIGIOUS FIGURES, AND THE COMMUNISTS WILL LIKELY CONTINUE TO RETAIN A LOW PROFILE.

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01-Jan-1994 12:00:00 am
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: POLITICAL PARTIES, PARTY ELECTIONS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Sent Date: 14-Dec-1977 12:00:00 am
Decaption Date: 01-Jan-1960 12:00:00 am
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 22 May 2009
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1977MANAGU05638
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D770466-0781
Format: TEL
From: MANAGUA
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1977/newtext/t19771258/aaaabwoy.tel
Line Count: 108
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: e7563a04-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION ARA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 31-Mar-2005 12:00:00 am
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 241780
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: UDEL ELECTS NEW LEADERSHIP
TAGS: PINT, NU
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odbc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/e7563a04-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
22 May 2009
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 22 May 2009